

that he was given the alternative between death and New Mexico. He had made the sensible choice. He went with regret, because he was in love with Mary, and he dreaded the rivals that flocked about the wealthy heiress.

"Marry me and come with me," he had urged.

Mary declined. Cold-hearted, she was not going to bury herself in New Mexico with a man who might not live out the year. But she promised to be true to him.

And her letters, gay and full of stories of her home life, had made him incredibly homesick — until he met Juanita.

Now, riding homeward, he knew that Mary was only the pale shadow of his love; that Juanita had his heart and always would have it. He was going home because as a man of honor there was no other course. And he was going home cured.

He had not heard from his fiancée for several weeks. And Ralph had dared to hope what he had once feared — that she, too, had learned that her heart lay in another's keeping.

A week later he stepped off the platform of the Grand Central station in New York. As he rode in a taxicab toward the home of his fiancée the solution of his problem came to him at last. Why should he make two lives unhappy if — if Mary did not care for him. He would be as frank with her as she had always been with him.

He descended at the door. When he rang the butler stared at him in amazement; the man remembered him and had thought that he would never return.

"I'll tell Mrs. Leeson, sir," he stammered.

"Not Mrs. Leeson, but Miss Mary," explained Ralph.

The butler did not seem to hear him. Ralph walked into the parlor and sat down. His heart was beating fast and there was an undefinable

sense of change. Ralph thought the butler had seemed less courteous than formerly. The furniture was covered, the room had not been dusted for some time. Ralph wondered — he was conscious of something which added to the pain of the approaching interview. When it was all over he must hurry home to his folks in Albany, stay awhile, tell them of Juanita —

Mary stood before him. She had come in so quietly that Ralph had not heard her. There was a strange look in her eyes. She shrank away from him, staring hard.

"I happened to be home," Ralph heard her saying.

"But, Mary, Mary——"

"You have not heard?"

"Heard what?"

"Sit down," she answered calmly. "I see you do not know. I am a poor woman, Ralph. My father was involved in the crash of the banks last month. I couldn't write — I didn't know what you would think——"

The young man's heart sank, his hopes ebbed, vanished. He seemed plunged into an abyss from which there was no escape. He understood the coldness of her greeting now. She was prepared to release him. She thought he would not want to marry her when her father was a bankrupt.

And that was what made his plans impossible. How could he ask her to release him now? The face of Juanita shone upon the background of his spiritual vision.

"Mary, it doesn't make any difference," he heard himself saying.

She was staring at him. "Any difference?" she echoed.

"I mean—did you suppose that I would not want to marry you because you are poor?"

She was still staring at him. She rose and put her hands upon his shoulders.

"Ralph, you—you have met another girl you care for, haven't you?" she asked frankly.

Why, the light of understanding in